DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 362 332 PS 021 820

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TITLE A Needs Assessment of Fifth Grade Students in a Middle School.
PUB DATE [92]
NOTE 60p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Elementary School Students; *Grade 5; Intermediate Grades; *Middle Schools; *Needs Assessment; *School Orientation; School Policy; Sex Differences; Student Adjustment; *Student Needs; Surveys; Transitional Programs
IDENTIFIERS Middle School Students; Social Needs

ABSTRACT

The transition from elementary school to middle school or junior high school can be exciting, stressful, scary, and fun all at once for young adolescents. The stress of this transition can either be diffused or augmented by school procedures for introducing these students to the school. In this study, a needs survey was given to a heterogeneous class of 23 fifth-graders in a middle school. It was found that social and procedural needs were considered the most important by the students, and lack of assistance from adults was perceived as highest for certain social needs. The results indicate that needs of early adolescents are not always adequately addressed during their transition to middle school. An appendix provides a copy of the student needs survey instrument. Contains 19 references. (MDM)

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ED 362 332

# A Needs Assessment of Fifth Grade Students in a Middle School

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**STUDENT NEEDS**

**ABSTRACT**

The transition from elementary school to middle school or junior high school can be exciting, stressful, scary and fun all at once for young adolescents. The stress of this transition can either be diffused or augmented by school procedures for introducing these students to the school. This study suggests that the most effective and efficient way to determine what the needs are of a particular population is to go to the source and ask the students.

In this study a needs survey was given to a heterogeneous class of twenty-three fifth graders in a middle school. For analysis the needs on the survey were placed into categories of academic, procedural and social needs. Results were then analyzed for each gender group as well as the total sample.

It was found that social and procedural needs were found to be most important for this sample, and lack of assistance from adults was perceived as highest for certain social needs. Generalizations were not possible for the small sample size, however it is suggested that a study with a larger subject group could be highly beneficial for determining which needs of the students in this population may need more adult attention.

## INTRODUCTION

Determining the needs of students in their early adolescence who are making the transition from elementary to middle school has become a topic of concern for educators today. This particular population of students has changing needs and concerns of its own which need to be addressed in the schools, especially during this transition period. This study was done to determine what needs fifth grade students in a middle school setting perceive to have been important needs during their transition from elementary school, and how much assistance they feel they were given with these needs.

The premise upon which this research is based is that students needs can only be determined by asking them directly. As adults we may perceive situations differently than our pre-adolescent or adolescent students. Previous research has been done on middle level students and their characteristics and needs, as well as research on how schools can and should address these needs. The intention of this study is to look specifically at one heterogeneous class of fifth graders to determine what they feel their most important needs to be and how these results compare to

what the literature says about the middle grade student. This study intends to illustrate that the best way to determine how to meet the needs of a particular group is to ask actual members of the group what those needs are.

Their are two major purposes for doing this study, the first of which is to find out which needs from a list of common needs of students in middle schools are perceived as having been most important to fifth grade students upon entering a middle school. Students will be asked to determine which needs they think are important and which they think are not as important. By analyzing the data it is anticipated that certain needs will be found to be important by a majority of students while others will be considered less important. The second major purpose of this study is to determine how well assisted by teachers and other adults in the school students felt they were with needs they consider to be important or unimportant. It is hoped that the results of this study will be helpful in deciding the areas in which students are being well assisted during the transition process and in which areas some improvement may be necessary.

It is hypothesized that certain needs will be

considered more important than others by the students on the whole. Student responses will no doubt vary, however it is predicted that commonalities among responses will exist. Because social roles and situations are of increased importance for the middle level student (University of the State of New York [USNY], 1984; Campbell, 1991) it is hypothesized that social needs such as knowing how to make new friends will be seen as having great importance. In regard to levels of assistance provided for each need, it is hypothesized that, according to students, adequate assistance has been given for certain needs and that certain needs may need to be given more attention by teachers and administrators. Because past literature has stated that friendship and peer relations are often seen as the most important aspect of school for young adolescents (Campbell, 1991), it is thought that certain social needs in particular will be perceived as not adequately addressed.

A large body of research has been devoted to studying developmental needs of preadolescent and adolescent students including physical, social, intellectual and emotional needs. The literature stresses that middle level schools need to be carefully constructed in order to address these needs (Dorman,

1985; Dorman, 1983; Lake, 1991; Smith, 1991). School environment, teacher accessibility and social support systems have been identified as some factors that may ease the transition from elementary to middle schools (Felner, Ginter & Primavera, 1982; Hirsch & Rapkin, 1987; Elias, Ubriaco, Reese, Gara, Rothbaum & Haviland, 1992; Schlosser, 1992). This study is being conducted in a fifth and sixth grade upper elementary school in Central Virginia. This school was chosen because of the young age of the fifth graders who are being assimilated into a middle school setting for the first time, most of whom are coming from non-departmentalized, self-contained fourth grades in the elementary schools. It is hoped this study will be useful in taking the first step toward ascertaining which needs should be heavily concentrated on in this particular school in order to best ease the transition of fifth graders beginning middle school.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The adolescent years can be frustrating, confusing, challenging, and exciting for students and educators alike. This particular group of students is in the process of experimenting with different

identities, developing socially and intellectually , and forever striving for more and more independence. Current literature in education has focused on the particular characteristics and needs of students in the middle grades (grade 5 through grade 8). In this section recent studies and journal articles will be explored that discuss characteristics of middle grade students, stressors during transition to a middle school setting, specific concerns within a middle school setting, and suggestions for what schools can do to ease the transition process.

## Characteristics of Middle Grade Students

Middle grade students (grades 5 through 8) have certain characteristics that are unique to this phase of life (Campbell, 1991). Physically, student's growth varies more during this time than at any other time (Campbell, 1991). In fact studies have shown that at the middle level it is not unlikely to find a six to eight year span in physical maturity in a single grade classroom (Lipsitz, 1980). This period of growth is the most dramatic, aside from infancy, in the human life span (USNY, 1984). Physical maturity occurs now at a younger age than in the past, with growth spurts beginning for some girls at age 10 and for some boys at

age 11 (USNY, 1984). Partially because of all the changes going on with their bodies, middle level students develop a heightened concern for their appearance (Campbell, 1991). Some students develop a self-consciousness about awkwardness caused by differing rates of growth in different parts of their bodies (USNY, 1984). Students at this age often experience extreme restlessness and need some kind of physical release during the day (USNY, 1984; Dorman, 1985). At the same time they also have a tendency to tire quickly, for example in gym class, due to their growth spurts (Campbell, 1991). Because of the restlessness of early adolescents, and the fatigue, attention span is seriously affected in middle grade students (Campbell, 1991; Dorman, 1983).

Along with the physical maturity of students in the middle grades, students are also beginning to develop socially. Studies have shown that students at this age are increasingly seeking approval from peers rather than adults (USNY, 1984). Campbell (1991) has stated that for the middle grade student friendship and belonging are the most important aspects of school. He goes on to say that students at this age will go far to gain a friend or access into a social group.

Differences in the social development of students vary widely for this age group, more so than for students either younger or older (USNY, 1984). Students at this age need positive social interactions with both their peers and adults (Dorman, 1983), especially because students at this age are beginning to resent adult restrictions more and more (USNY, 1984).

Intellectually middle grade students are in the process of shifting from concrete to formal operational thinking (Dorman, 1983; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). Students approaching and in adolescence are beginning to develop the ability to think and reason in more abstract ways, however the rate at which this occurs differs greatly among individuals (USNY, 1984). Along with this cognitive shift that is occurring, it is also characteristic of the middle grade student to be a fairly shallow thinker (Campbell, 1991). Campbell contends that students at this age have difficulty thinking in terms of long-term goals, but rather see all situations in the short-term. They need help in developing the ability to think beyond the short-term. Campbell further asserts that it is often the general disorganization of adolescents that adds difficulty for teachers in the process of teaching and for students in

the process of learning.

Emotions of students at the middle level can be very delicate and need to be treated as such. Pre-adolescents and adolescents are struggling with defining their own concepts of themselves and their place in their world, which can put a strain on their emotional states (USNY, 1984; Campbell, 1991). Stress levels are high in students at the middle level due to peer pressure, characteristic self-consciousness, defining of social and sex roles, and physical development, or lack thereof (USNY, 1984; Campbell, 1991). Coping with these stress factors while attempting to gain increased independence and maturity can be very confusing and all consuming for 10 to 15 year olds (Dorman, 1983). The high stress emotional state of the pre-adolescent and adolescent student often results in unpredictable, erratic behavior patterns and personalities that fluctuate from cheerful to belligerent (USNY, 1984). Students at this level have an extreme sense of fairness as well which results in excuses and "righteous indignation" when they feel they have been treated unfairly (Campbell, 1991).

**Transition Stressors**

Combined with the characteristics of the middle

grade student discussed in the previous section, the transition to middle school or to junior high school can be a stressful event for many students. Transitions involve adaptation to a set of psychosocial tasks which include a variety of factors (Elias et al., 1992; Elias, Gara & Ubriaco, 1985). An unfamiliar environment, shifts in role definition, new sets of peers and adults, uncertainty about rules and procedures and lack of knowledge of how to access support resources are all factors that need to be adapted to (Elias et al., 1992; Elias, Gara & Ubriaco, 1985). The transition into middle school often signals the end of childhood and the beginning of adolescence (Hirsch & Rapkin, 1987). This shift can have a serious impact on role definition and self-esteem. It is a time when some students will be displaced from the social and academic mainstream. For some students this displacement may be the beginning of a cycle of negative interactions and experiences that may be difficult to break (Elias, Gara & Ubriaco, 1985).

Satisfaction with school life has also been studied in middle school students. Studies have found that perception of the quality of school life declines from elementary to secondary grades, with a large

decline occurring around the time of transition to middle school (Hirsch & Rapkin, 1987). This decline was found to occur regardless of academic ability (Hirsch & Rapkin, 1987; Elias et al., 1992). Poorer academic performance has been observed in students that have undergone a transition as well (Felner, Ginter & Primavera, 1982). Peer social support has been found to be one factor in determining success of adjustment (Hirsch & Rapkin, 1987; Elias et al., 1992). Students who have the support of a best friend or social group were shown in these studies to be more successful in adjustment.

Felner, Ginter and Primavera (1982) have suggested that preventive efforts be targeted at groups that are undergoing stressful life transitions. Students who are entering the middle school or junior high setting are one such group. Felner, Ginter and Primavera describe the transition to high school as a "state of flux" with all incoming students given the task of adjusting to a new physical environment and a larger set of peers and school personnel. These factors can hinder the adjustment process for students. This description also fits the transition to middle school. Students coming to a middle school are often coming

from a variety of feeder elementary schools, therefore this same scenario is occurring. Elias, Gara and Ubriaco (1985) suggest that of great importance in studying transition to middle school is the recognition of the possibility that administrators may misperceive problems of the transition and undervalue out-of-school and peer relationships as sources of support. By targeting this group and attempting to understand the transition process from a student's standpoint, administrators may be able to develop a program that will ease the transition and decrease or remove extreme sources of stress (Felner, Ginter & Primavera, 1982).

## Specific Concerns in the Middle School Setting

### Friendship

Friendship begins to take on a special significance for middle grade students. Friendship becomes more intimate and intense during this time (Berndt, 1982). Berndt offers three explanations for this intensification. The first explanation is that the onset of puberty may cause adolescents to turn to their peers for comfort and support during what is often a confusing and troubling time. A second explanation offered is that the social environment for adolescents if different that the environments of

students either younger or older. Adolescents are in the process of gaining independence from adults. No longer are they treated as little children, however they are also no where near adult status. Berndt suggests that this confusing social position may be the cause of stronger relationships with peers. Thirdly, cognitive changes are occurring at the onset and throughout adolescence. Students at this age are attempting to define themselves and are also beginning the development of understanding of and empathy for others. Berndt suggests that this may also lead to more meaningful relationships with peers.

Rejection

As young adolescents are highly concerned with developing friendships and group acceptance (Campbell, 1991), it follows that peer rejection is also a strong concern for students at this age. Studies have been conducted to determine relationships among aggressive behavior and peer acceptance. Parkhurst and Asher (1992) found the profile of popular middle school students to be students who are low on aggressiveness and disruptiveness, average in assertiveness, and perceived by peers as kind and trustworthy. Rejected status was found to be associated with aggressiveness

or lack of prosocial qualities. Students who were identified as either a bully or someone who was "easy to push around" were seen as somewhat neglected by peers (Parkhurst & Asher, 1992). It has been found that although aggressive adolescents may alienate many peers, the friendships that they do have are no less meaningful than those of non-aggressive students (Cairns, Cairns, Neckerman, Gest & Gariepy, 1988).

Peer rejection has been associated with risk of becoming the victim of a bully (Boulton & Underwood, 1992). Victims are less likely to report being happy in school, and are more likely to report feelings of loneliness and a tendency to be alone during playtimes (Boulton & Underwood, 1992; Parkhurst & Asher, 1992). Submissive-rejected students are most often found to be the victims of bullying (Parkhurst & Asher, 1992).

Teacher distance and student alienation

Schlosser (1992) studied teacher engagement with students as related to students disengagement from school or alienation resulting in non-participation, misbehavior and poor achievement. Because of departmentalization of subjects students in the middle grades experience less contact with individual teachers than in elementary school and there is a greater

emphasis on teacher control (Schlosser, 1992). Schlosser's data indicates that teachers' beliefs about the needs of young adolescents can positively or negatively effect their relationships with marginal students. Teachers who engage themselves with the students and teach them skills leading to autonomy are much more successful than teachers who assume this autonomy should already exist. Schlosser's study concludes that reducing teacher distance from students and increasing understanding of developmental needs is crucial in the education of adolescents, especially marginal students.

**What Schools Can Do to Ease the Transition**

An effective school climate for the middle grade student is student-centered, active, caring, warm and positive (Lake, 1991; Dorman, 1983). Educators at this level must have a clear understanding of the diversity that exists within this age group in order to teach them effectively. Students in the middle grades need ample opportunities to try out their new physical, social, and cognitive abilities to determine what they do well (Dorman, 1983). A variety of teaching methods and learning opportunities are crucial in aiding students in their pursuit of self-discovery (Lake,

1991; Dorman, 1983). Physical movement should be incorporated into classroom activities because it is both uncomfortable and unproductive for adolescents to sit still for long periods of time (Dorman, 1983; Campbell, 1991; Dorman, Lipsitz & Verner, 1985).

While engaging in a quest for independence, middle grade students still have a strong need for the security provided by clear limits and expectations from adults (Dorman, 1983; Dorman, Lipsitz and Verner, 1985). Dorman, Lipsitz and Verner (1985) suggest that students have an active role in determining at least some of the rules and expectations so that a greater degree of understanding and ownership of those rules exists for the students. At the same time rigid structure and excessive limits should be avoided because of the tendency of adolescents to become hostile or rebellious toward authority (Dorman, Lipsitz and Verner, 1985; Campbell, 1991).

Studies have shown that an advisor-advisee program is crucial for the adjustment of middle school students (Campbell, 1991; Dorman, 1983). These programs provide students with someone to whom they can turn in times of confusion or trouble with other students or teachers. These programs also provide students with someone who

is monitoring their progress and can intervene early when trouble signs begin.

Smith (1991), a principal at a middle school in Massachusetts, outlines a program that has proven effective in his school in easing the transition for entering fifth graders. He describes a student-centered program consisting of three major steps: 1. Visits, 2. Information and 3. Orientation programs. Visits involve field trips for fourth graders to the middle school where they are able to meet fifth grade teachers and receive a tour of the school from a current fifth grader. Information is given to the students in the form of a booklet that describes programs, schedules and other topics of concern to entering students. Finally the orientation program is a four-day summer program at which any imaginable aspect of middle school is addressed. Smith claims these steps have helped incoming fifth graders to feel more comfortable and better adjusted when they arrive at the middle school.

**Summary of Literature Review**

Because of the particular needs of the middle grade student, it is important that schools become aware of these needs and provide adequate support for

these students. Students at this level are in the process of developing socially, intellectually, emotionally and physically and are therefore not particularly stable individuals. It is during this stage of life that students are first experiencing a degree of independence and self-exploration that they have not experienced before. Schools for middle grade students need to become aware of the particular needs of their students and develop methods of adequately addressing these needs. This study is intended to provide a method for assessing important needs for a middle school population and determining which needs the school may need to address more fully in the future.

## DESIGN OF THE STUDY

### Sample

The sample group in this study consists of 23 fifth grade students at an Upper Elementary School in Central Virginia. The class was chosen because of its heterogeneous nature, both in sex, academic ability and ethnicity. Eleven of the students surveyed are male and twelve are female. Of the males five are African-American and six are white. Of the females five are

African-American and seven are white. Heterogeneity exists in the academic ability and socio-economic status of the students as well.

**Measure**

A survey was designed based on a compilation of needs cited in the literature as common needs of students entering middle school. The four teachers of the students surveyed were asked to choose from a list of forty-five needs which ten they considered to be most important for students entering their school as fifth graders. Teachers were also asked to write down any additional needs not listed they felt to be important for these students. Based on the replies of the teachers, a survey of 21 items was constructed (see Appendix A). For each need students were given four replies to choose from: A) is an important need and I did receive help with it, B) is an important need and I did not receive help with it, C) is not an important need and I did receive help with it, and D) is not an important need and I did not receive help with it.

**Design**

Surveys were given to students during one forty-five minute period. The instruction page was read to the students and an example item was done. Students

were then instructed to take their time and answer each item as honestly as possible. Students were asked not to talk to one another during the time surveys were being completed. This process was monitored by the researcher and the student's teacher to be certain that students understood directions and were able to ask questions at any time. At the end of the survey students were asked to identify their gender.

Each item will be analyzed in terms of both the degree of importance to the students and the students perception of assistance from teachers or other adults in the school with these needs. First each item will be looked at to determine how many students gave each answer (A, B, C or D). A percentage will be calculated for each answer within each item. This will be looked at both in terms of gender of respondents and total response. The next step will be to determine how many students found this need to be important (answers A or B) and how many found it to be unimportant (answers C or D). Each item will then be assessed as to whether or not the students felt assisted in this need. Answers A and C indicate the students felt assisted and answers B and D indicate inadequate assistance as perceived by the students. This will also be looked at

in terms of gender response and total response. The last step will be to look for trends or most common answers both within each gender and in the sample as a whole for each need to determine whether some needs are overwhelmingly viewed as important or unimportant, and adequately or inadequately assisted.

**Analysis**

For analysis, all items on the survey were first placed into one of three categories: 1. Academic Needs, 2. Procedural Needs, and 3. Social Needs. Some items were placed in more than one category if applicable (see Appendix A, Table 1). Academic needs were defined as needs that had to do with school work and/or teacher expectations. Procedural needs were defined as needs that had to do with ways of doing things in the school (i.e. rules, routines, knowledge of the building, etc.). Social needs were defined as any need that had to do with peer or adult interactions during or related to the school day (not including academic interactions with teachers). Data was then separated into male response, female response and total response. Results will be discussed in terms of percentage responses within each group in respect to the two main goals of this study: 1. To determine

which needs are considered most important in this sample of students, and 2. To determine which of the needs deemed important are perceived as lacking adult assistance. Trends will be discussed for the different categories of academic, procedural and social needs, as well as trends for the two gender types and total response.

**Summary**

In summary, for this study a heterogenous class of fifth grade students were given a needs survey that was designed with input from their teachers. The students completed the survey during one class period, monitored by the researcher and the student's teacher.

In chapter IV results will be presented graphically showing responses in terms of both importance of each need and degree of assistance with each need. Items will be placed into categories of social, procedural and academic needs and discussed in terms of these categories. Results will be presented for total response and for gender responses. Results will be discussed in relation to the hypotheses presented in Chapter I.

## ANALYSIS OF DATA

In this section data will be discussed in two

sections: 1. Perception of the importance of individual needs, and 2. Perception of the adequacy of adult assistance given for individual needs. For each section results of male, female and total response will be presented.

**Perception of the Importance of Individual Needs**

It was hypothesized in this study that certain needs would stand out as being more important than others according to the fifth graders in the sample studied. Graphic representations of the results for all the needs addressed (divided into categories of academic, procedural and social needs as defined in Chapter III) can be found in Appendix B. In this section results that indicate the needs found to be most important for each group of respondents (male, female, and total) will be discussed. Degree of importance was determined by the percentage of students that responded in the affirmative when asked whether or not they felt a particular need is an important one.

Male response

Needs indicated as important by the highest percentages of male subjects, in order of importance, are as follows: 1. To know how to get my books and supplies ready for different classes, 90%; 2. To know

a teacher I could talk to if I was confused about something, 90%; 3. To know how to make new friends, 90%; 4. To know how I am expected to behave in different classes, 90%; 5. To know the school rules and consequences for breaking those rules, 80%; 6. To know what is expected of me in P.E., 80%; 7. To know how to get extra help from my teachers, 80%; 8. To have a chance to talk to some of my friends from elementary school on the first day, 80%; 9. To have ways to get to know some of the other students on my team, 80%; 10. To know who I could talk to if I had a problem with another student, 80%; 11. To know what to do if another student tries to start a fight with me, 80%.

Of these eleven needs, two are academic needs, two are procedural needs, six are social needs, and one is both an academic and a procedural need. The need indicated as least important according to male response is " To know how I will be treated by the sixth graders", a social need, which only 50 % of the male subjects marked as important.

Female response

The ten needs considered most important according to the highest percentages of female response, in order

of importance, are as follows: 1. To know how to find my classes and my way around the school, 100%; 2. To know the school rules and consequences for breaking those rules, 100%; 3. To know a teacher I could talk to if I was confused about something, 100%; 4. To know travel patterns between classes, 100%; 5. To know what to do if another student tries to start a fight with me, 100%; 6. To know who I could talk to if I had a problem with another student, 91.7%; 7. To know how to get involved in clubs and other after school activities, 91.7%; 8. To know how to get extra help from my teachers, 91.6%; 9. To know how to make new friends, 91.6%; 10. To know what is expected of me in P.E., 83.4%.

Out of these ten needs considered most important two are academic needs, three are procedural needs, and five are social needs. The need considered least important by female subjects is "To know how much homework I will have from each teacher", an academic need, with only 33.3% responding to it as an important need.

Total response

The ten most important needs according to total response of both male and female subjects are as

follows: 1. To know a teacher I could talk to if I were confused about something, 95.4%; 2. To know the school rules and consequences for breaking those rules, 90.9%; 3. To know how to make new friends, 90.9%; 4. To know what to do if another student tries to start a fight with me, 90.9%; 5. To know how to get extra help from my teachers, 86.4%; 6. To know who I could talk to if I had a problem with another student, 86.4%; 7. To know travel patterns between classes, 86.4%; 8. To know how I am expected to behave in different classes, 86.4%; 9. To know how to find my classes and my way around the school, 86.3%; 10. To know how to get my books and supplies ready for different classes, 86.3%.

Of these needs, one is an academic need, four are procedural needs, four are social needs, and one is both an academic and procedural need. The least important need based on data from the entire sample is "To know how much homework I will have from each teacher", an academic need which only 50% of the students found to be important.

**Perception of the adequacy of adult assistance**

A second hypothesis in this study was that certain needs that were considered to be important would be perceived by students as lacking adequate adult

assistance. The results for each survey item are separated into categories of academic, procedural and social needs and are presented graphically in Appendix C. In this section results will be discussed according to the percentage of students who found the need to be important who also indicated that they felt they were not adequately assisted with this need. As in the previous section, results will be broken down into male response, female response and total response. The three needs perceived as most lacking in assistance and the three needs perceived as least lacking in assistance will be discussed for each group, as well as the categories of academic, procedural and social that have been determined for each need.

Male response

In 24% of the twenty-one needs on the survey, over 50% of male subjects who marked the need as important indicate a lack of assistance. The three needs found lacking in assistance by the highest percentage of male respondents were: 1. To know how my work will be graded by different teachers, 57.1%; 2. To know how much homework I will have from each teacher, 57.1%; 3. To know how to get involved in clubs and other after school activities, 57.1%. Of these needs, two are

academic needs and one is a social need.

The three needs indicated as lacking assistance by the least number of male subjects that perceived the need to be important are as follows: 1. To know where the library is, 0%; 2. To know how to get my books and supplies ready for different classes, 11.1%; 3. To know how to find my classes and my way around the school, 14%. All three of these needs fall into the category of procedural needs.

Female response

In 14% of the twenty-one needs given on the survey, over 50% of the female subjects who marked the need as important indicated a lack of adequate assistance. The three needs perceived as lacking in assistance by the highest percentage of female respondents are as follows: 1. To have a chance to talk to some of my friends from elementary school on the first day, 87.5%; 2. To know how to make new friends, 63.6%; 3. To know where the library is, 60%. Of these needs, the first two are social needs and the third is a procedural need.

Needs that are perceived as lacking in assistance by the lowest percentages of female subjects are as follows: 1. To know lunchroom routines and procedures,

11.1%; 2. To know how to find my classes and my way around the school, 16.7%; 3. To know how much homework I will get from each teacher, 25%; 4.To know what to do if another student tries to start a fight with me, 25%. Of these needs one is an academic need, one is a procedural need, one is a social need and one is both an academic and a social need.

Total response

For 14% of the twenty-one items on the survey, greater than 50% of the subjects who marked the need as important indicated a lack of assistance. The three needs indicated as lacking in assistance by the greatest number of subjects are: 1. To have a chance to talk to some of my friends from elementary school on the first day, 68.8%; 2. To know how to make new friends, 60%; 3. To know who I could talk to if I had a problem with another student, 52.6%. All three of these needs fall into the category of social needs.

The three needs indicated as lacking in assistance by the lowest percentages of subjects are: 1. To know lunchroom routines and procedures, 13.3%; 2. To know how to find my classes and my way around the school, 15.8%; 3. To know how to get my books and supplies ready for different classes, 26.3%.

**SUMMARY**

Results for the different groups studied vary to a degree, but as was hypothesized many commonalities were found in student responses. Social needs make up the majority of the ten most important needs for both male and female subjects, followed by procedural needs and then academic needs. For total response social and procedural needs are indicated as equal in importance and academic needs are once again least represented in the top ten.

In terms of assistance for important needs responses also varied to a degree, but commonalities exist as well. For the three needs perceived as most lacking in assistance by male subjects two out of the three are academic needs and the third is a social need, for female respondents two out of the three are social needs with the third being a procedural need, and for total response all three are social needs. For all three groups the category of needs that are seen as least lacking in assistance are procedural needs.

In the following section these results will be discussed in relation to previous research conducted on adolescent needs and needs of students entering a

middle school situation. Implications of these responses and suggestions for further exploration will also be discussed.

## DISCUSSION

Findings from this research are significant in that they provide a glimpse into the self-perceived needs of a small sample of early adolescents. Results from this study are fairly consistent with what are described in current literature are pervasive needs of middle grade students, especially those experiencing the transition from elementary to middle school. In this section specific findings will be discussed as well as their implications for the particular school setting in which this research was conducted.

Social development and relationships have often been identified as primary concerns for the adolescent student. For this reason it was hypothesized at the outset of this study that needs categorized as social needs on the survey instrument would be considered highly important by the fifth grade participants. This hypothesis proved relatively accurate, as results for the total sample as well as individual gender results illustrate. Out of the ten needs found to be most

important for the total sample, four are social needs. For the male portion of the sample, six out of their top needs are social needs, and for the female portion of the sample five out of the top needs are also social needs. Needs related to peer interaction that were identified as highly important by the total sample included making new friends, having the opportunity to talk to old friends, and knowing what to do in a negative situation with another student (i.e. threatening behavior, stealing, teasing, etc.). One need that girls identified as highly important that boys did not was to know how to get involved in extra-curricular activities. Needs that were among the top ten in importance for boys but not for girls were the opportunity to talk to elementary school friends on the first day and ways to get to know other students on their team. Despite these differences, most of the social needs considered important by girls were also considered important by boys.

Interestingly, the one social need that was considered most important by the total sample, with 95.4 % of the sample marking it as important, is not a peer related social need, but rather one that has to do with the student / teacher relationship. To know a

teacher to talk to if confused about something was identified as important by one hundred percent of the girls surveyed and ninety percent of the boys. Even in their quest for increased independence and heightened peer relations it seems that these students truly desire an adult mentor to help them through confusing times. Schlosser (1992) asserts that teacher proximity to students is crucial in providing a positive educational experience for middle grade students and it appears that the students in this sample would support this assertion. A "teacher advocacy program", as described by Campbell (1991), addresses this important need of students by providing a one-on-one relationship with a particular teacher becoming an individual student's advocate. This teacher checks on students progress periodically, talks to the student both formally and informally, and basically becomes the adult in the school who most closely monitors the progress of the student.

One stressor that occurs during the transition from elementary to middle school is the requirement of learning and adapting to a whole new set of procedures and rules. Many of the needs identified as procedural needs in this study are things that may cause some

difficulty and stress for students who are not yet used to their new school. Knowing the school rules and consequences, knowing travel patterns between classes, knowing behavior expectations of different teachers, knowing how to find classes and ways around the school, and knowing how to get books and supplies ready for different classes are all needs that were identified as highly important by this sample. All of these procedures are likely to be different in the middle school than at the elementary schools from which the students have come. In the needs that girls identified as most important, their primary procedural concerns are to know the rules and to have a clear concept of how they are to travel around the building. Boys agree that knowing the rules is important but they are also highly concerned with teacher expectations in terms of behavior and getting books and supplies ready for different classes.

Academic needs that were placed high on the scale of importance involved knowing behavior and performance expectations of different teachers and knowing how to get extra help from teachers. Students in this sample were less concerned with knowing how they were going to be graded or how much homework they would have. In the

transition to middle school, students need to learn how to cope with what is often a new experience of having more than one primary teacher. For this reason adjusting behavior to please different adults at different times during the day and finding time to get help from someone who is not available all during the day can be major causes of stress for students involved in the transition to middle school.

Perhaps even more useful than the results for the needs students find important are the results for their perception of the assistance that they received from adults for different needs. By exploring the needs which students identified as lacking in assistance appropriate solutions can be determined to make sure these needs get met in the future. In the total sample none of the needs were identified as lacking in assistance by greater than seventy percent of the population, however certain needs were identified by more than fifty percent of students who found the need to be important. One need was identified as lacking in assistance by 87.5 percent of the girls surveyed, but no others exceeded a negative response of sixty-five percent of the girls sampled. According to the male response, none of the needs were considered lacking in

assistance by more than fifty-seven percent of those who found the need important.

All three of the needs that were considered most lacking in adult assistance according to the total sample are social needs. Several different explanations may be offered for these results. The first such explanation is that perhaps because early adolescence is a time when peer relations are all important and adults are often believed to get in the way of these interactions, students are more inclined to perceive adults as wanting to block their social interactions rather than helping them to occur.

A second explanation that could be offered is that perhaps teachers and administrators have overlooked the importance of peer support during transitions. Hirsch and Rapkin (1987) have found a strong association between peer support and perception of school life. They have found a large decline in perception of school life from elementary to secondary school with the largest decline occurring during the transition to middle school or junior high school. This effect may well be caused by the fact that students entering middle school are encountering a new, larger peer group than ever before and often are placed away from former

elementary school friends. Hirsch and Rapkin have found that students with best friends or membership in a social group are often better able to cope with the stress of transition. The needs identified as most lacking by this sample, being given a chance to talk to elementary school friends on the first day and knowing how to make new friends, relate directly to Hirsch and Rapkin's research. By addressing these needs more fully and encouraging peer support systems during the transition to middle school schools may be able to help decrease the negative view of school life that Hirsch and Rapkin have found in these middle grade students.

All of the needs considered least lacking in assistance by the total sample are procedural needs. Because teachers and administrators are actively involved in the procedures and routines in the classroom and around the school building, perhaps this is why these needs are the ones that are perceived as best assisted.

Although for the total sample the needs most lacking in assistance were all social needs, the gender samples differed somewhat. Boys in this sample appear to feel a lack of assistance with academic needs, such as knowing how work will be graded by different

teachers and knowing how much homework to expect from each teacher. Of the male sample, 57.1 percent found a lack of assistance for these needs along with knowing how to get involved in clubs and other after school activities. Girls, on the other hand did not identify a lack of assistance with academic tasks at all, rather the results for the female sample were close to those for the total sample, with 87.5 percent of the girls indicating a lack of assistance in getting to talk to elementary school friends on the first day and 63.6 percent indicating a lack of assistance in knowing how to make new friends. Sixty percent of the female sample also indicated a lack of assistance with knowing the location of the library ( a procedural need).

**Implications and recommendations for future research**

The results of this study indicate that needs of early adolescents are not always adequately addressed during their transition to middle school. Because of the small sample size in this study generalizable conclusions can not be accurately drawn. However, the results of this study do suggest that similar future studies with a larger sample of the fifth grade class would be useful in determining what steps are necessary to help improve the transition process. Ideally it

would be very useful to administer a survey of this sort to all fifth graders a month or two into the school year. The results obtained from a study of this magnitude would be extremely useful for designing programs that would make fifth grade students more comfortable and more easily transitioned into what is often a stressful environment of a middle school.

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## APPENDIX A:
## Survey instrument

**INSTRUCTIONS:**

For each item you will be asked to decide whether or not you feel the given need was important to you when you first entered the fifth grade **AND** whether or not you feel you received help in dealing with that need. For each item you will have the same four answers from which to choose.

A. Is an important need and I did get help with it.
B. Is an important need and I did not get help with it.
C. Is not an important need and I did get help with it.
D. Is not an important need and I did not get help with it.

For example, if the need given was:

---

**To know how to act in the auditorium before homeroom.**

---

First you need to decide whether or not you think this is something that it is important for an entering fifth grader to know.

* If you feel it is an important need you will choose either **A** or **B**.
* If you decide the need is not important you will choose either **C** or **D**.

The second decision you need to make is whether or not you feel this is a need you received help with from your teachers or other adults at your school.

* If you have decided the need is important:
  - circle **A** if you feel you did get help
  - circle **B** if you feel you did not.
* If you have decided the need is not important:
  - circle **C** if you feel you did get help with it anyway,

- circle D if you feel you did not get help.

For each item you will have to make these same two decisions. If you are unsure about what answer to put for an item, put the answer that best fits your feeling.

Thank you for participating in this survey. All answers expressed here will be kept completely anonymous, so no one will know which answers you gave and it will in no way affect how you are graded in this class or any other class. Please be honest!!

**PRACTICE ITEM:** We will do this one together.

---

**To know what happens on the first day of school.**

A. Is an important need and I did get help with it.

B. Is an important need and I did not get help with it.

C. Is not an important need and I did get help with it.

D. Is not an important need and I did not get help with it.

---

**NOW YOU ARE READY TO BEGIN. If you have any questions at any time, do not hesitate to ask a teacher. Please do not discuss your answers with your neighbors.**

---

**To know how to find my classes and my way around the school:**

A. Is an important need and I did get help with it.

B. Is an important need and I did not get help with it.

C. Is not an important need and I did get help with it.

D. Is not an important need and I did not get help with it.

---

**To know the school rules and consequences for breaking those rules:**

A. Is an important need and I did get help with it.

B. Is an important need and I did not get help with it.

C. Is not an important need and I did get help with it.

D. Is not an important need and I did not get help with it.

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**To know how to get my books and supplies ready for different classes:**

A. Is an important need and I did get help with it.

B. Is an important need and I did not get help with it.

C. Is not an important need and I did get help with it.

D. Is not an important need and I did not get help with it.

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**To know when I am allowed to go to my locker:**

A. Is an important need and I did get help with it.

B. Is an important need and I did not get help with it.

C. Is not an important need and I did get help with it.

D. Is not an important need and I did not get help with it.

---

**To know how my work will be graded by different teachers:**

A. Is an important need and I did get help with it.

B. Is an important need and I did not get help with it.

C. Is not an important need and I did get help with it.

D. Is not an important need and I did not get help with it.

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**To know what is expected of me in P.E.:**

A. Is an important need and I did get help with it.

B. Is an important need and I did not get help with it.

C. Is not an important need and I did get help with it.

D. Is not an important need and I did not get help with it.

---

**To know how to get extra help from my teachers:**

A. Is an important need and I did get help with it.

B. Is an important need and I did not get help with it.

C. Is not an important need and I did get help with it.

D. Is not an important need and I did not get help with it.

---

**To know how much homework I will have from each teacher:**

A. Is an important need and I did get help with it.

B. Is an important need and I did not get help with it.

C. Is not an important need and I did get help with it.

D. Is not an important need and I did not get help with it.

---

**To have a chance to talk to some of my friends from elementary school on the first day:**

A. Is an important need and I did get help with it.

B. Is an important need and I did not get help with it.

C. Is not an important need and I did get help with it.

D. Is not an important need and I did not get help with it.

---

**To have ways to get to know some of the other students on my team:**

A. Is an important need and I did get help with it.

B. Is an important need and I did not get help with it.

C. Is not an important need and I did get help with it.

D. Is not an important need and I did not get help with it.

---

**To know a teacher I could talk to if I was confused about something:**

A. Is an important need and I did get help with it.

B. Is an important need and I did not get help with it.

C. Is not an important need and I did get help with it.

D. Is not an important need and I did not get help with it.

---

**To know how to make new friends:**

A. Is an important need and I did get help with it.

B. Is an important need and I did not get help with it.

C. Is not an important need and I did get help with it.

D. Is not an important need and I did not get help with it.

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**To know who I could talk to if I had a problem with another student:**

A. Is an important need and I did get help with it.

B. Is an important need and I did not get help with it.

C. Is not an important need and I did get help with it.

D. Is not an important need and I did not get help

with it.

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**To know lunchroom routines and procedures:**

A. Is an important need and I did get help with it.

B. Is an important need and I did not get help with it.

C. Is not an important need and I did get help with it.

D. Is not an important need and I did not get help with it.

---

**To know who I can sit with at lunch:**

A. Is an important need and I did get help with it.

B. Is an important need and I did not get help with it.

C. Is not an important need and I did get help with it.

D. Is not an important need and I did not get help with it.

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**To know travel patterns between classes:**

A. Is an important need and I did get help with it.

B. Is an important need and I did not get help with it.

C. Is not an important need and I did get help with it.

D. Is not an important need and I did not get help with it.

---

**To know how I am expected to behave in different classes:**

A. Is an important need and I did get help with it.

B. Is an important need and I did not get help with it.

C. Is not an important need and I did get help with it.

D. Is not an important need and I did not get help with it.

---

**To know what to do if another student tries to start a fight with me:**

A. Is an important need and I did get help with it.

B. Is an important need and I did not get help with it.

C. Is not an important need and I did get help with it.

D. Is not an important need and I did not get help with it.

---

**To know where the library is:**

A. Is an important need and I did get help with it.

B. Is an important need and I did not get help with it.

C. Is not an important need and I did get help with it.

D. Is not an important need and I did not get help with it.

---

**To know how to get involved in clubs and other after school activities:**

A. Is an important need and I did get help with it.

B. Is an important need and I did not get help with it.

C. Is not an important need and I did get help with it.

D. Is not an important need and I did not get help with it.

---

**To know how I would be treated by the sixth graders:**

A. Is an important need and I did get help with it.

B. Is an important need and I did not get help with it.

C. Is not an important need and I did get help with it.

D. Is not an important need and I did not get help with it.

---

Please circle one:

I am a: **BOY** **GIRL**

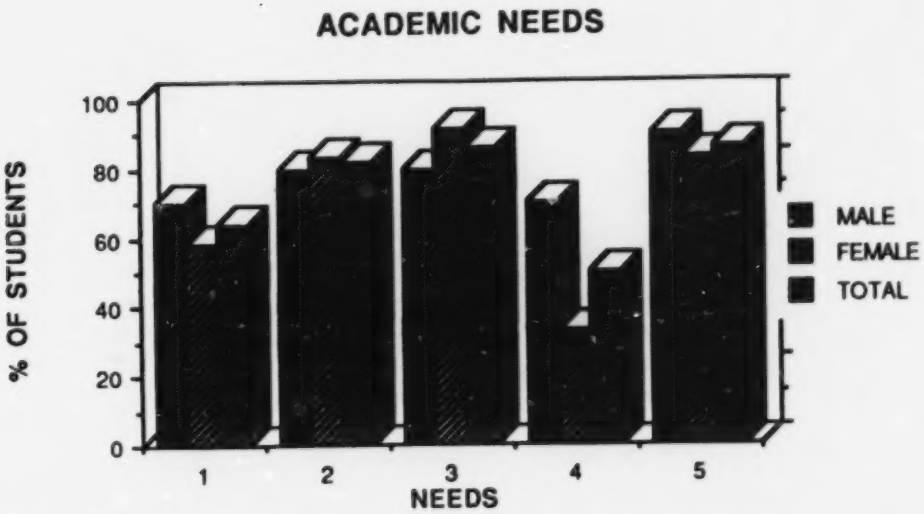
## THANK YOU!! YOU'RE ALL DONE!!!

TABLE 1: Categorization of needs

| ACADEMIC NEEDS | PROCEDURAL NEEDS | SOCIAL NEEDS |
|---|---|---|
| 1. to know how my work will be graded by different teachers | 1. To know how to find my classes and my way around the school | 1. To have a chance to talk to some of my friends from elementary school on the 1st day |
| 2. To know what is expected of me in P.E. | 2. To know the school rules and consequences for breaking those rules | 2. To have ways to get to know some of the other students on my team |
| 3. To know how to get extra help from my teachers | 3. To know how to get my books and supplies ready for different classes | 3. To know a teacher I could talk to if I was confused about something |
| 4. To know how much homework I will get from each teacher | 4. To know when I am allowed to go to my locker | 4. To know how to make new friends |
| 5. To know how I am expected to behave in different classes* | 5. To know lunchroom routines and procedures | 5. To know who I could talk to if I had a problem with another student |
| | 6. To know who I can sit with at lunch* | 6. To know who I could sit with at lunch* |
| | 7. To know travel patterns between classes | 7. To know what to do if another student tries to start a fight with me |
| | 8. To know how I am expected to behave in different classes* | 8. To know how to get involved in clubs and other after school activities. |
| | 9. To know where the library is | 9. To know how I would be treated by the sixth graders |

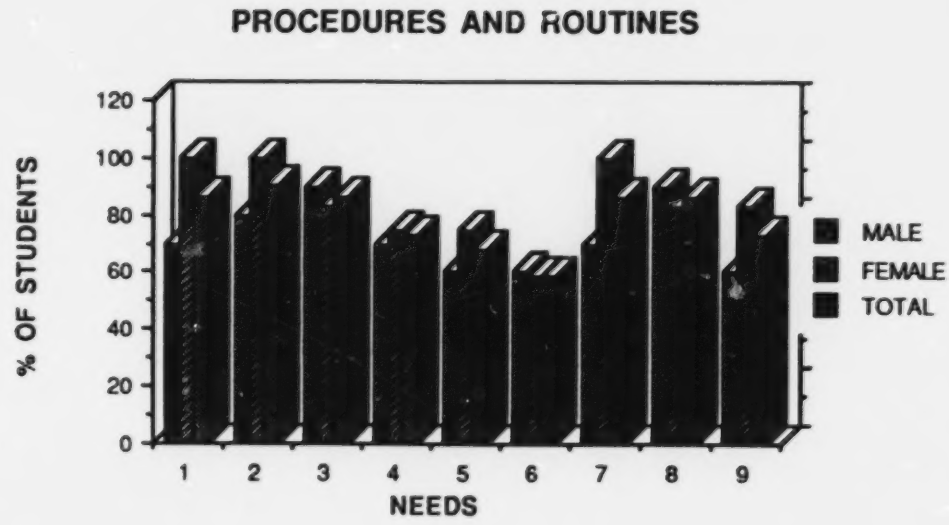
* Appears in more than one category

**APPENDIX B:**
Graphic representations of perceived importance of needs



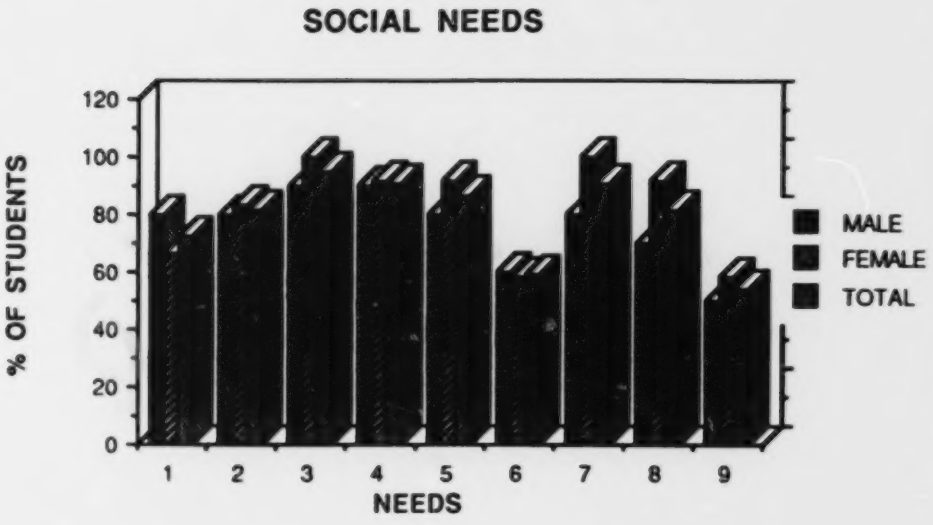

**KEY**

1. To know how my work will be graded by different teachers
2. To know what is expected of me in P.E.
3. To know how to get extra help from my teachers
4. To know how much homework I will have from each teacher
5. To know how I am expected to behave in different classes




**KEY**

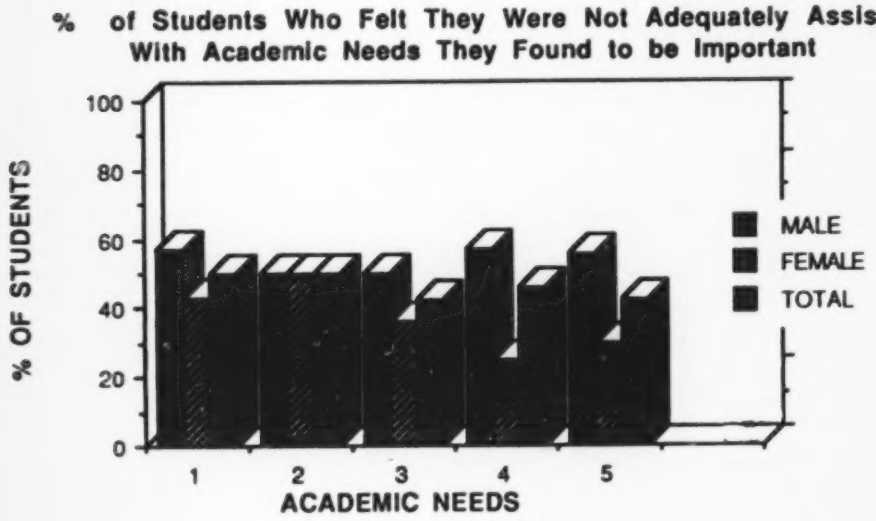
1. To know how to find my classes and my way around school
2. To know the school rules and consequences for breaking those rules
3. To know how to get my books and supplies ready for different classes
4. To know when I am allowed to go to my locker
5. To know lunchroom routines and procedures
6. To know who I can sit with at lunch
7. To know travel patterns between classes
8. To know how I am expected to behave in different classes
9. To know where the library is




KEY

1. To have a chance to talk to some of my friends from elementary school on the first day
2. To have ways to get to know some of the other students on my team
3. To know a teacher I could talk to if I was confused about something
4. To know how to make new friends
5. To know who I could talk to if I had a problem with another student
6. To know who I could sit with at lunch
7. To know what to do if another student tries to start a fight with me
8. To know how to get involved in clubs and other after school activities
9. To know how I would be treated by the sixth graders

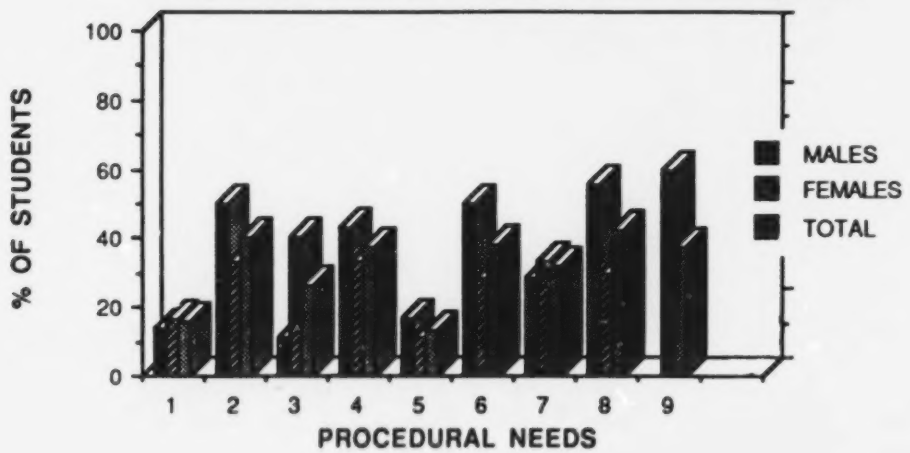
## APPENDIX C:
## Graphic representation of perceived adequacy of adult assistance with needs




**KEY**

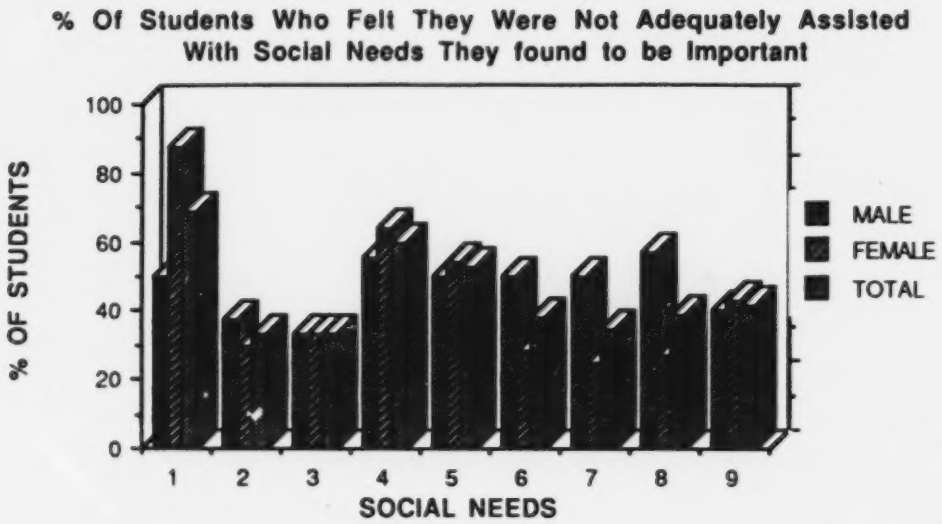
1. To know how my work will be graded by different teachers
2. To know what is expected of me in P.E.
3. To know how to get extra help from my teachers
4. To know how much homework I will have from each teacher
5. To know how I am expected to behave in different classes

**% Of Students who Felt They Were Not Adequately Assisted With Procedural Needs They Found to be Important**




**KEY**

1. To know how to find my classes and my way around school
2. To know the school rules and consequences for breaking those rules
3. To know how to get my books and supplies ready for different classes
4. To know when I am allowed to go to my locker
5. To know lunchroom routines and procedures
6. To know who I can sit with at lunch
7. To know travel patterns between classes
8. To know how I am expected to behave in different classes
9. To know where the library is




KEY

1. To have a chance to talk to some of my friends from elementary school on the first day
2. To have ways to get to know some of the other students on my team
3. To know a teacher I could talk to if I was confused about something
4. To know how to make new friends
5. To know who I could talk to if I had a problem with another student
6. To know who I could sit with at lunch
7. To know what to do if another student tries to start a fight with me
8. To know how to get involved in clubs and other after school activities
9. To know how I would be treated by the sixth graders